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SUBJECT: CANADA'S PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS GLOBALLY

REF: A. OTTAWA 407
[1](#)B. OTTAWA 123
[1](#)C. OTTAWA 758
[1](#)D. 07 OTTAWA 1982
[1](#)E. OTTAWA 621
[1](#)F. OTTAWA 373
[1](#)G. OTTAWA 593

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Canada remains a strong partner in promoting and defending human rights globally. Thanks to its "principle-based" approach, the Conservative Party believes that "Canada's voice is being heard" once again. Canada has awarded honorary citizenship to the Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi, served as the sole vote against anti-Israeli UN Human Rights Council resolutions, and enacted tough sanctions against Burma. Liberals and other critics, however, have argued that the Conservative government has been too brash in its handling of some human rights issues, claiming that PM Harper's positions have reversed Canada's historic role as a bridge-builder and balanced broker in foreign affairs. While the main political parties always try to score partisan points on various human rights stances and approaches, Canadian society remains fundamentally committed to promotion of democracy and human rights at home and abroad, and all future governments -- of whatever party -- will maintain this role for Canada throughout the world, both unilaterally and in multilateral partnerships with the U.S. and other like-minded democracies. End summary.

SPEAKING OUT

[1](#)2. (SBU) Under the slogan "Canada is back," Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper since taking office in 2006 has been especially vocal in his criticism of human rights abuses in various countries of concern. Characterizing his approach to human rights as "principle-based," PM Harper has specifically cited democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law as the four core values that guide the government's foreign policy. Conservative Party members have claimed publicly and privately that, unlike previous Liberal governments, PM Harper's government has not been afraid to make difficult, and at times controversial, decisions. They have criticized the Liberals for "talking a good game" on human rights and democracy but when in office having mostly worked to avoid upsetting relations with key trading partners. In November 2007, PM Harper stated that, "for the first time in a very long time, Canada's voice is being heard and as a consequence of its voice being heard is that we're getting the changes we want to see....That's what a country with an active foreign policy does." Some journalists and political commentators have praised PM Harper for his foreign

policy style and promotion of human rights abroad, with one calling PM Harper a leader who "has the courage of his convictions and who brushes off criticism as the cost of leadership."

CHINA

13. (SBU) China has been a special focus of PM Harper's defense of human rights abroad. In June 2006, Canada's Parliament -- at the Conservative government's request -- granted the Dalai Lama honorary Canadian citizenship, and in October 2007, PM Harper became the first Canadian prime minister formally to receive the Dalai Lama in his office on Parliament Hill. China reacted angrily in both instances, with China's political counselor in Canada warning that Canada's policies would "gravely undermine" Canadian-Chinese relations and calling the 2007 meeting "blatant interference in China's internal affairs." The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister also voiced their strong concern over the Chinese response to unrest in Tibet in March 2008 (ref a), and the Prime Minister made clear that he would not attend the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics (although he sent Foreign Minister David Emerson). PM Harper has also pressured China to provide Canadian citizen of Uyghur origin Huseyin Celil (whom China has sentenced to life in prison on terrorism charges) access to Canadian consular officials and family members. In defending his decision to pressure China on the case, PM Harper stated that, while he believed Canadians wanted their country to promote trade relations worldwide, he did not think Canadians wanted their government to "sell out important Canadian values" to the "almighty dollar." PM Harper has also been quick to point out, however, that Canada's trade with China continues to grow and that one of his three stated foreign policy priorities was to engage with emerging and growing markets, especially China and India.

ISRAEL

14. (SBU) Canada has also taken a number of strong positions in defense of Israeli human rights. In January 2008, Canada announced it would not attend the 2009 Durban Review Conference for the UN World Conference Against Racism, stating the conference had "degenerated into open and divisive expressions of intolerance and anti-Semitism" (ref b). Canada also defended Israel in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), and in January 2008 was the sole vote against a resolution condemning Israeli actions in Gaza. During annual U.S.-Canada-Mexico Trilateral meetings in May 2008, Canadian officials stated that one of Canada's top priorities at the UN HRC was to prevent the unfair treatment of Israel (ref c). In addition, in March 2006 Canada became the first country to suspend donor aid to the Palestinian Authority in response to the election of a Hamas-led government. Canada remains committed to maintaining its suspension of aid until Hamas makes a "clear commitment" to renounce terrorism and to recognize the State of Israel.

...AND ELSEWHERE

15. (SBU) Canada has taken a strong stand against human rights violations in Burma, imposing sanctions in 2007 that it called the toughest any country has imposed (ref d). This was a rare instance of Canada overcoming the very high threshold that Canadian law sets for such sanctions. Canada also stood up for human rights in Burma when, in May 2008, Canada formally awarded honorary Canadian citizenship to Burmese democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi (which Sein Win accepted in her absence) in May 2008 (ref e).

16. (SBU) Canada continues also to defend human rights elsewhere. When Pakistani President Musharraf imposed emergency rule and cracked down on democracy in November 2007, Canada led the push for, and helped to achieve consensus on, Pakistan's expulsion from the Commonwealth of

Nations. On Afghanistan, PM Harper skillfully worked out a bipartisan consensus with the Liberal Party on the extension of Canada's mission in Kandahar until 2011, which not incidentally commits Canada to help rebuild the country in support of democracy and human rights (ref f). Canada has spoken out forcefully both in public and in private about human rights concerns in Belarus, Cuba, Syria, Iran, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, inter alia. In addition, Canada works collaboratively to promote human rights through such multilateral institutions as the UN HRC, the UNGA Third Committee, the Organization of American States, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Asia-Pacific Democracy Partnership (as ref f described more fully).

...BUT NOT ALL ASSESSMENTS POSITIVE

17. (SBU) Not all commentary on PM Harper's foreign policy and human right promoting has been positive, however. Liberal Parliamentarians and some other critics have chastised PM Harper, for example, for allowing Canadian-Chinese relations to cool (notably his failure even to visit China since taking office) and, according to them, hurting Canadian strategic and economic interests. They have pointed to China's refusal to classify Canada as an "approved destination status" for Qto classify Canada as an "approved destination status" for tourism as one worrisome consequence, and noted that, while bilateral trade was growing, Canada's share of the overall Chinese market was falling. Former Liberal prime minister Jean Chretien stated in August that PM Harper's failure to attend the Olympic opening ceremonies meant that Canada was now "at the bottom of the ladder with China" and that Canada had "lost a lot of ground" with China.

18. (SBU) One respected human rights activist told poloff in August that, while he believed PM Harper's government had defended human rights in "some" instances, such as on China's human rights record, overall he was disappointed in the government's "erosion of leadership" on human rights -- particularly regarding the Middle East. He claimed that the current government had "clearly" sided with Israel, ignoring human rights violations against the Palestinians and "destroying" Canada's reputation as a fair mediator in the Middle East. He also claimed that, by "aggressively" campaigning against certain human rights instruments such as UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, PM Harper had undermined Canada's historic legacy as a balanced partner and a "bridge-builder."

COMMENT

19. (SBU) Canada continues to serve as a strong partner in promoting human rights globally, in addition to having established one of the world's most successful democratic systems at home. While the main political parties always try to score partisan points on various human rights stances and approaches, Canadian society remains fundamentally committed to promotion and protection of democracy and human rights, and all future governments -- of whatever party -- will maintain this role for Canada throughout the world, both unilaterally and in multilateral partnerships with the U.S. and other like-minded democracies.

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WILKINS